

# SB 1099 (Steinberg)

## Sibling Visitation

### Fact Sheet

#### BACKGROUND

Currently, there are 60,000 foster youth in California.<sup>1</sup> These youth are removed and taken away from their homes and placed into the state foster care system due to no fault of their own. These causes are related to abuse and/or neglect.

Upon entering care, many foster youth find themselves experiencing the additional trauma of separation and instability due to their new and sometimes unfamiliar living situation. In these cases, contact or a relationship with a sibling may be the only strong connection they have left in their life.

The Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 (PL 110-351) made it a priority that siblings entering the foster care system would be placed together in the same foster home. Unfortunately, only slightly over half of children and youth in foster care are placed with all of their siblings.<sup>2 3</sup>

In 2000, Assembly Bill 1987 (Steinberg, Chapter 909, Statutes of 2000) was signed into law to establish laws that strengthen sibling connections and to ensure that foster youth are informed of their sibling visitation rights. However, the state's children and youth in foster care continue to find that local policies and practices in implementing these laws are keeping children and youth from developing a healthy relationship with their siblings.

#### SUMMARY

Despite the statutory protections that exist meant to encourage and strengthen sibling connections through visitation, foster youth are

still running into obstacles that the law fails to cover.

Specifically, siblings who have their visitation suspended, due to the court finding some initial detriment to such contact, are struggling to have the suspension lifted several months or even years later even after circumstances have changed.

In addition, sibling visitation guidelines are largely absent for cases when siblings share a biological parent but one child is in the foster care system while the other child is not in the foster care system.

This legislation aims to address these issues and help siblings maintain important connections with one another. In January 2013, the Children's Bureau/Administration for Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) found a significant association between sibling visitation and both permanency and well-being outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

#### THIS BILL

- Would make minor and technical changes as it relates to the issue of sibling visitation to the following sections of the Welfare and Institutions code: 388(b), 362.1(a)(2), WIC 358.1(d), WIC 366(a)(1)(D), WIC 366.1(f), and WIC 366.3(e)(9).
- Would also add language to the statute to address the issue of visitation between siblings if one is a dependent of the juvenile court and one is not. This is achieved by amending the following code sections: WIC 361.2(j), WIC 388(b), and WIC 16002(a).

<sup>1</sup> [http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb\\_childwelfare/PIT.aspx](http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare/PIT.aspx), October 2013, February 17, 2014

<sup>2</sup> <http://lao.ca.gov/reports/201,3/ssrv/child-neglect/child-neglect-080813.pdf> (pg.29), February 17, 2014

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/siblingissues.pdf> (pg.3), February 17, 2014

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/siblingissues/siblingissues.pdf> (pg.12), February 17, 2014

### **SUPPORT**

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California Youth Connection (Sponsor)  
All Saints Church Foster Care Project  
California Alliance  
Children Now  
Crittenton Services for Children & Families  
East Bay Children's Law Offices  
Juvenile Court Judges of California  
Legal Advocates for Children & youth  
National Association of Social Workers

### **OPPOSITION**

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None at this time